FLASH!

Va-va-voom! Marilyn's Dress Goes for $1.26 M

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Marilyn Monroe's form-fitting, flesh-colored dress — a sequined stunner first worn at President John Kennedy's 1962 birthday party, but still dropping jaws nearly 40 years later — sold last night for a record $1,267,500.

The dress, worn by Monroe during her breathless "Happy Birthday" serenade to JFK, was the highest-priced item at the first session of a two-day Manhattan auction — everything from her blue jeans and bikini bottoms to screenplays and sweaters.

The hammer price for the dress was $1.15 million; the final sale price includes commission.

Thirty-seven years after her death, Monroe grabbed the spotlight again during bidding that culminated in a wild 2½-minute showdown for the dress that she barely wore at JFK's May 19, 1962, birthday celebration at Madison Square Garden.

The crowd cheered loudly when the winning bid was announced. It set a new record for an auctioned dress, obliterating the $222,500 paid for an ink-blue Princess Diana gown sold in 1997.

Bidding quickly escalated from $200,000 to the winning price for the dress created by Oscar-winning costume designer Jean Louis. The dress, made of silk souffle gauze and covered with 6,000 rhinestone beads and sequins, originally cost $12,000.

The auction began promptly at 7 p.m. at Christie's in Midtown Manhattan, with a winning bid of $88,300 for a picture of Monroe autographed by an assortment of her Hollywood co-stars — Groucho Marx, Jimmy Stewart, Lauren Bacall, Humphrey Bogart and others.

The night's first big-ticket item — a platinum eternity ring, encrusted with 34 baguette-cut diamonds, given to Monroe by ex-husband Joe DiMaggio — sold for $772,500. The pre-sale estimate was $30,000 to $50,000.

That winning bid was typical, as bidding far outpaced what experts at Christie's auction house had predicted. A baby grand piano, once owned by Monroe's mother and reacquired by the actress years later, sold for $632,500; its pre-sale estimate was $10,000 to $15,000.

A 1956 triptych of Monroe, taken by photographer Cecil Beaton, sold for $145,500 — well above the estimate of $15,000-$20,000.

Even a plaster floor lamp, estimated at $2,000-$4,000, sold for $21,850.

Even before the infamous JFK dress sold, a new record for a Monroe dress was set. A full-length black sequined evening dress, which Christie's said was worn by the movie star during a 1954 visit to soldiers in Korea, sold for $112,000.

UPI File Photo, 1962

The dress Marilyn Monroe wore when she sang "Happy Birthday" to Kennedy got the highest bid at the auction.

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